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ABSTRACT

This inquiry was designed to review the processes and identify some of the factors which were associated with violent confrontations in the East End of London, England and to make appropriate recommendations for action. Interviews were conducted with both indigenous respondents and Bengali and West Indian respondents during August through October, 1978. They made various suggestions for improving race relations in the area, including the recruitment of more Bengalis on the Council of Citizens; the improvement of housing, health, and social service provisions; and better police-community relations. Respondents were unanimous in their condemnation of all types of attacks against Bengalis and other groups and of organized attempts to incite racial violence and hatred. In the minds of the majority of those interviewed, these attacks are clearly associated with the manner in which the police have responded to the situation. (Author/RLV)

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BRICK LANE & BEYOND:

AN INQUIRY INTO RACIAL STRIFE AND
VIOLENCE IN TOWER HAMLETS

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FOREWORD

The Commission for Racial Equality was set up under the Race Relations Act, 1976, to carry out the following duties:

- (a) to work towards the elimination of racial discrimination,
- (b) to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial origins generally and,
- (c) to keep under review the working of this Act and, when required to do so by the Secretary of State, or other wise think it necessary to draw up and submit to the Secretary of State proposals for amending it.

In the course of carrying out its duties, the Commission is empowered to undertake such inquiries or research into situations which fall within its terms of reference or, indeed, assist others to undertake such work. Such inquiries or research studies as it undertakes are intended to:

- (1) assist policy-makers and others to pursue equal opportunity policies within their own organisations and areas of activity and
- (2) be of 'strategic value' in the sense that their results and the policies they point to should be applicable to related organisations and areas of activity far beyond those which were covered in the initial fieldwork.

This inquiry was specifically concerned with events in the East End of London during 1978; understandably, its results and the recommendations to which they lead are pertinent to improving circumstances in that part of the country and thus promote a reasonably satisfactory state of relations between groups in the area. Nevertheless, some of its findings are relevant to authorities outside of the area; for instance, the need to ensure that prosecutions are brought under the incitement provisions of the Race Relations Act, 1976 is relevant to all areas in the country in which extremist groups and individuals attempt to stir up racial hatred. Similarly, the need to ensure that local authorities are alive to the needs of their residents and take steps to meet those needs is one which applies generally throughout the country.

The violent events in the East End of London during 1977 and 1978 are disturbing; but the findings of this inquiry demonstrate that there is a tremendous fund of goodwill among the population in the area as a whole and a determination to ensure that these events do not occur again in that area or, indeed in other areas. At the present time, efforts to promote good race relations should be stepped up in the Tower Hamlets area. Towards this end, the Commission has recently awarded twelve bursaries to professionals such as police officers, social workers, trade unionists, teachers and health visitors. One of these awards enabled a senior police officer from Tower Hamlets to visit Bangladesh and other parts of the Indian sub-continent.

The recommendations which are appended therefore call for serious study not only by groups and various authorities in the area but also by all those in the community who share the common responsibility for promoting good race relations in this country.

Peter Tucker
Chief Executive

Preface and Acknowledgements

Since the Commission started work in 1977, it has received field reports from various sources indicating that race relations in the East End of London, especially in the area of Tower Hamlets was less than satisfactory and that some extremist organisations such as the National Front sought to exploit conditions in the area in order to propagate their political views. The Commission was concerned about these developments, increased its liaison with various groups and organisations in the area and maintained a watching brief on events. In the summer of 1978, it launched an integrated programme of work with various organisations in the area, one component of which is the inquiry reported in the following pages. This inquiry was designed to review the processes and identify some of the factors which were associated with violent confrontations in the area and to make appropriate recommendations for action. It was conducted during the months of August, September and October, 1978; a draft report of its results was prepared in November and has been the basis of informal consultations with several individuals and organisations in the area. Its publication had to await the outcome of these consultations.

In order to locate this inquiry in its proper perspective, it is essential to stress that:

- (a) this inquiry was specifically aimed at, and therefore limited to, establishing the processes and factors which were associated with the outburst of violence in the area of Tower Hamlets, in order to ensure that such recommendations as emerged could be taken up with the urgency demanded by the situation in that area; accordingly, several otherwise interesting developments in the area had to be excluded (e.g. its admirable tradition of resistance to Fascism during the 1930s or the effect of the Dockland Scheme on population movements out of the neighbouring areas) because the terms of reference of this inquiry precluded a consideration of these issues;
- (b) it was essential to 'tap' the views of all residents in the area and not just the views of members of the Bengali community in the area who were either the victims of violence or were involved in some of the incidents which took place in the area. Accordingly, in-depth interviews were conducted with various indigenous respondents as well as with Bengali and West Indian respondents. The views expressed were sometimes critical of the activities of organisations which operate in the area; at other times, the activities of these organisations were applauded. These views are reproduced in the following pages and are central to the overall conclusions which emerged from the inquiry and
- (c) since this inquiry was undertaken as part of a strategic programme of work on behalf of the Commission, it was pursued in parallel with other activities. As the inquiry received evidence which indicated the need for immediate action in a particular context, a specially constituted in-house Working Party undertook consultations with the relevant authorities and took active steps to implement the inquiry's recommendations. However, this inquiry includes such recommendations in the interest of completeness as well as others which have yet to be implemented. The Commission will be taking steps to see that these recommendations are implemented as soon as possible.

We are grateful for the help which we have received from several organisations and individuals in the area of Tower Hamlets in undertaking this inquiry; however, as they have requested that we do not identify them, we are unable to express our appreciation of their goodwill by name. We are also grateful to all the respondents — from all racial groups — who took time off to participate in the interviews. The officers responsible for undertaking this inquiry and preparing this report are Mr Simon Williams, Mr Ameer Ali and Mr Paul Stephenson.

Dr Crispin Cross
Principal, Research Department

Introduction

The inquiry reported in this document is the result of the deep concern and anxiety expressed in many quarters about the deterioration in race relations which occurred in the East End of London particularly in the Spitalfields ward of Tower Hamlets, over the six month period between January and July 1978. This period was also marked by a very noticeable increase in violence and racial strife and much of this violence was directed against Bengali residents in the area.

In view of this disturbing development, the Commission initiated this inquiry whose terms of reference were:

- (1) To examine the relevant processes and where possible identify some of the factors which are associated with the recent racial violence in the East End of London, particularly in Tower Hamlets.
- (2) To make appropriate recommendations.

In addition, the Commission set up an internal Working Party to liaise with this inquiry and co-ordinate the implementation of such recommendations as emerge.

Methods Adopted

In designing this survey, we had to overcome two basic and inter-related constraints. First, it was necessary to conduct interviews and consultations over a very short period of time, due to the urgency of the situation in the East End. Second, there was quite understandably, some reluctance by many people to be interviewed by, or even talk to, officials of a body with powers to undertake formal investigations.

In order to overcome these difficulties, we relied on local organisations operating in the area — the Council of the Citizens of Tower Hamlets (CCTH) and the Spitalfields Project — and compiled a sampling frame from which respondents were selected. Respondents were chosen on the basis of their being recognised representatives of established agencies in Tower Hamlets or of the local ethnic minority community.

Our sample fell into two categories. In the first group, which consisted of representatives of established community-based organisations, each person contacted was asked to talk about the 'servicing' role of his or her agency. Spokespersons of the second group, (which consisted of representatives of the Bengali Community) were asked to address themselves to the extent to which a wide range of needs within the Bengali community were met by local community-based bodies. To elicit information in each of these classes of interviewees, in-depth interviews were conducted using two interview schedules (See Appendix (1) and (2)).

The average interview with the Bengali Group of respondents lasted about one and a half hours. In contrast, interviews with the other group lasted for between two and a half to six hours.

In order to gain some measure of the type and range of issues involved in the conflict, we had to rely on field reports and our understanding of the area.

The Changing Climate

"...Tower Hamlets is a touchstone of the deepening racial conflict and violence which has come to characterise the relationship between 'oppressed' blacks and many whites whose present life styles and future welfare are severely threatened by the spate of economic and industrial crises which have weakened the social and moral fabric of Western societies..." (A community worker in Tower Hamlets).

The remarkable deterioration in race relations witnessed in this country over the past two years can be attributed to many causes, both local and national. The high level of unemployment, the spate of economic and industrial crises and the apparent decline in social and moral values are some of the national factors associated with the changing climate. Locally, there is the unique character of the East End:

- (a) Its history of population movement and settlement;
- (b) The progressive and steep decline of its industrial infrastructure resulting in a high level of unemployment, abysmally low earnings, urban decay and a heavy dependence on industries whose need for labour has been steadily contracting;
- (c) The unique way in which its derelict industrial structure has been regenerated by successive waves of immigrants during this century;
- (d) Its tradition of working class conservatism and hostility towards newcomers.

These elements together constitute a geography of despair in which the roots of racial hatred and violence exist.

In addition, the National Front and other extreme right wing groups increased their activities throughout 1977 and for much of 1978 with leafletting, marches and political rallies in many areas with sizeable ethnic minority residents, including the area of Tower Hamlets. Such activity reached its peak around the May local council elections when the National Front fielded a record number of candidates.

A Community Under Siege

In early 1978, the geographical focus of the National Front's activities appeared to shift towards the Spitalfields area in general and Brick Lane in particular where the Bengalis have made their home. In Tower Hamlets, the Bengali community has been described as:

"... the modern heirs, economically as well as residentially, of the nineteenth-century East European Jews; they too find work in the rag trade and other low grade occupations; they too have their own language, their own shops, eating habits and religion. They even echo the Jewish passion for gambling..."⁽¹⁾

Their high concentration in an area, which is rapidly losing its indigenous white population, and their illiteracy in English (indeed many are also illiterate in their own language) easily make them victims of unflattering attention which in the past few months, has assumed a most violent form.

We have attempted to analyse the pattern of recorded attacks in terms of their geographical location, frequency and intensity. These attacks cover the period January 1976 to September 1978.

The following diagrams show the frequency and intensity of these attacks over the period covered by the record. Frequency is marked by the heavy lined area while intensity is represented by the shaded area.

Diagram 1. shows that, of all recorded attacks, just under a quarter (21.5%) took place in the 1976 period, with little over a quarter of all serious to fatal ones happening during the same period.

By contrast, Diagram II shows that well under an eighth of all serious to fatal attacks took place in the following year 1977 during which there was an increase in the frequency of attacks (32.3% compared with the 21.5% of the 1976 period).

In the following year (1978) the highest frequency (46.3%) and intensity (over half of all serious to fatal attacks) were recorded. In sum, these show that the frequency of attacks increased 100-fold as did their fatal consequences.

This analysis of the locality of these attacks suggests that they moved progressively closer to the Spitalfields area until they reached the centre (Brick Lane) where they became most frequent and intense.

Diagram I

Frequency and intensity of recorded attacks taking place in 1976 (Jan-Sept)

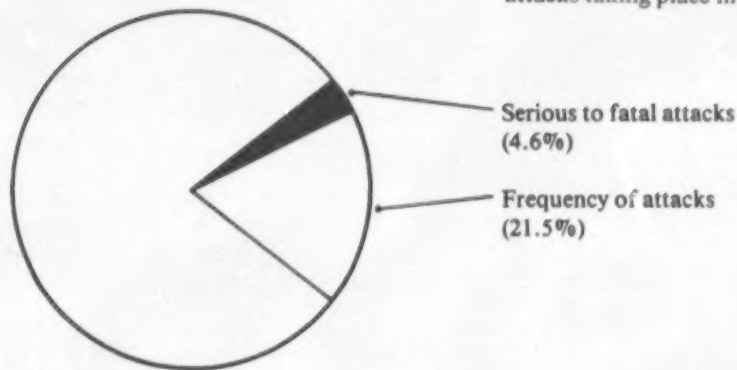


Diagram II

Frequency and intensity of recorded attacks taking place in 1977 (Jan-Dec).

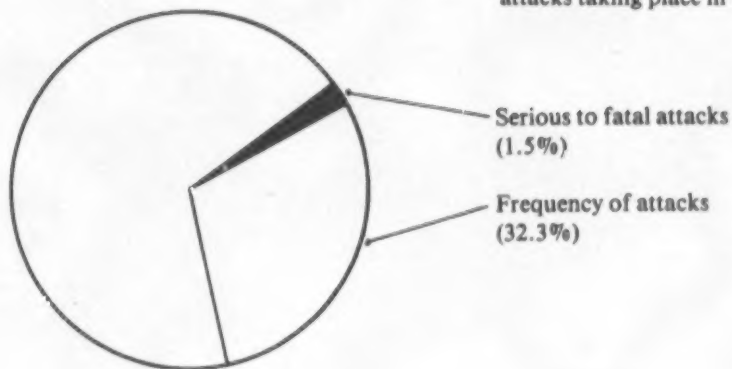
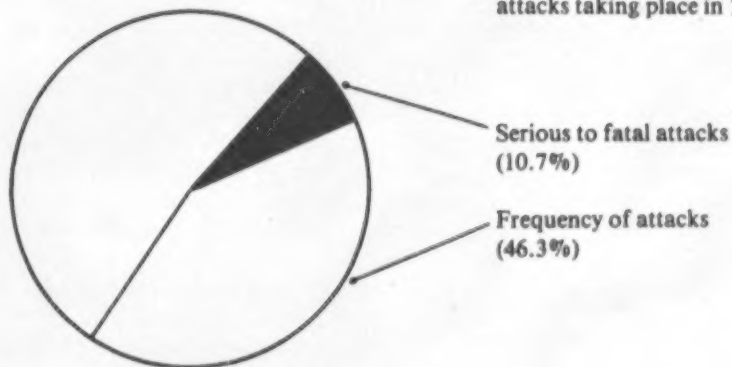


Diagram III

Frequency and intensity of recorded attacks taking place in 1978 (Jan-Sept)



Source: These diagrams are based on statistics contained in *Blood on the Streets*⁽²⁾

The Background to the East End

For many centuries now, London has been 'a point of arrival' for immigrants from many different parts of the world. The Flemings, French and Italians, of the 15th century, were attracted to London by the prosperity of Tudor England. They were followed by the Huguenots who came as a result of religious persecution suffered at the hands of the French. Then came the Irish, in the middle part of the 19th century, and the Jews, between 1870 and 1914, followed by Pakistanis, West Indians and other Commonwealth peoples, in the two decades after the Second World War.

Since the Huguenots, each wave of immigrants to London has settled in the same part, namely that district now known as Tower Hamlets, which is bounded westwards by the City, Islington and Highbury and eastwards by the River Lea. In the 12th century it was christened 'a tranquil paradise' by John Stow who referred to the plushness of its citizens' gardens and orchards, pastures and 'plain meadows with brooks running through them'.

Ambivalence Towards Foreigners

This under-developed tranquility soon yielded to the noise, humdrum and prosperity which followed each wave of immigration. Foreign settlers brought with them skills and industry which served to revitalise, and in later times, regenerate the social and economic order of the East End. For example, in the 16th century, under the Tudors, the Crown was said to view with favour the colonies of foreigners in and around London, while the surrounding population envied their prosperity and resented their competition. The silk industry which Elizabeth and James I had been attempting to set up over a period of many years, began to prosper only with the arrival of the Huguenots of whom it was said:

"...They made Spitalfields, abutting on the City Wall, their main base and turned out large quantities of lustrings, velvets, brocades, damasks'.

Their impact on local industry and profit was so remarkable that very many of the common folk began the practice of appending a Gallic name to many of their wares in order to promote their rapid and profitable sale. Others, however resented them because of their competitiveness.

Hostility and Resentment

The resentment shown to the Huguenots by the local Anglo Saxon eventually turned into contempt and hostility towards the Irish nearly two centuries later:

"...Victorian England looked upon Roman Catholics and Irishmen as inferior to themselves, and when Irishmen turned out to be Roman Catholic, as they generally did, the Englishmen regarded them as doubly inferior"⁽⁸⁾

Gradually a pattern of steadily increasing anti-alien feelings began to emerge, reaching a high-water mark during the period of Jewish immigration. A bitter campaign of anti-Semitism was organised from the East End of London where the vast majority of Jews from Eastern Europe had settled. In 1902 the East London Observer summed up this campaign in the following way:

"In the last quarter of a century there have been many popular agitations in East London ... We do not, however, remember any agitation fostered by greater impropriety, or one having had a quicker descent to the gutter, than the anti-alien movement which has been promoted by the British Brothers' League. It is more than half based on ignorance, bolstered up by prejudice and is justified only by selfishness ... As the agitation against the Alien proceeds the more violent become the agitators, the grosser their exaggeration, the fouler their abuse ... Notwithstanding suspicious protestations to the contrary, we believe anti-alienness is anti-Semitism in both origin and conduct"⁽⁹⁾

What gave an aura of legitimacy to this agitation against the Jews is described in the following passage:

"...they packed into slums that the British and even the Irish, were trying to quit, and settled into those few occupations that had been sanctioned in the ghetto: mainly street trading and tailoring. About one-third, probably, became tailors in London's East End, in Leeds and in Manchester; and the Jewish stereotype of the sad-eyed, greasy-locked, rat poor Yid stitching cross-legged in his ill-ventilated sweat shop came into being"⁽¹⁰⁾

They were 'beggars' who could not and did not 'choose' where to live or what to work at. They merely followed what must have seemed their natural destiny, 'to live in misery amongst their kin', the very destiny that was so cruelly and mercilessly exploited by those who showed no feeling towards them, except hatred:

"Whitechapel, standing as it does at the very gates of the City of London, the centre of the Empire, was never destined to become a foreign pauper settlement. It is intolerable that we should have unblushingly dumped down among us the very scum of the unhealthiest of continental nations...an outrage to the district"

The effectiveness of this type of vitriol in advancing the cause of anti-Semitism was of such great concern to the Jewish community that in 1888, the Jewish Chronicle made what amounted to a desperate plea to its brethren in the East End:

"If poor Jews will persist in appropriating whole streets to themselves in the same district, if they will conscientiously persevere in the seemingly harmless practice of congregating in a body at prominent points in a great public thoroughfare like the Whitechapel or Commercial Road, drawing to their peculiarities of dress, of language and of manner, the attention which they might otherwise escape, can there be any wonder that the prejudices of which they are the objects should be kept alive and strengthened? What can the untutored, unthinking denizen of the East End believe in the face of such facts but that the Jew is an alien in every sense of the word — alien in ideas, in sympathy, and in interests from the rest of the population, utterly indifferent to whom he may injure so long as he benefits himself, an Ishmael whose hand is against everyone, and against whom the hand of everyone may rightly be"⁽¹⁰⁾

Such sentiments, expressed against Jews, have been expressed in more recent times against groups of West Indians and Asians in various cities in England in which they have settled.

Industrial Development and Population Growth

During the nineteenth century, Tower Hamlets was a typically rapidly developing industrial area, attracting a large and mobile workforce to the area and thereby generating a considerable increase in the size and density of its population. This pattern of change was helped by two local factors, in particular, the location of the borough on the riverside and the construction of a new dock system in Wapping and on the Isle of Dogs. Growth in world trade and the immigration of labour from other areas and other parts of the world were associated with these developments.

The Legacy of Poor Housing

With quick development and a steep rise in population (which is said to have quadrupled during the 19th century) came a sudden increase in demand for housing. This led to the hurried construction of many poor quality houses without basic amenities such as running water, fixed baths and inside toilets. It was several years before the government intervened and enforced basic standards of drainage, daylighting and a number of other necessities.

Nonetheless, such basic amenities did not increase appreciably until the early 20th century when increased powers were given to local authorities which enabled them to embark on several building programmes. But, with limited finance, they were unable to keep pace with the steady and steep increase in public demand and population.

During the Second World War, however, when the construction of houses was gaining momentum, London experienced the blitz which led to the devastation of many dwellings and caused a serious setback to the housing expansion programme, from which the local housing authorities have never recovered.

The piecemeal and haphazard pattern of house-building which has emerged since the war has left many pockets of derelict and decaying properties where the oppressed and the inadequate, the misfit and the desperately poor have constantly sought refuge. The result was that the borough changed, over several centuries from a garden paradise of tranquility to a dilapidated and unattractive environment.

Section 3

Social Conditions in the East End

As part of our inquiry, we examined the social conditions obtaining in the area using locally available statistical information as well as information from the 1971 Census of Population.

Population Size, Age Structure and Economic Activity Rate

The population of the Borough of Tower Hamlets (165,775 in 1971) contains a relatively large proportion of single men who are attracted to the area by the prospect of employment on the docks and the existence of seamen's hostels and missions. 9.2 percent of the population of Spitalfields are believed to live in such accommodation, as against the figure for the whole borough which is under two percent (1.8%)⁽¹¹⁾

The proportion of Tower Hamlets' residents born outside the U.K. according to the 1971 Census is relatively low (12.2% compared with the figure for the GLC area as a whole (14.9%). Today (seven years later) however, the proportion of Tower Hamlets is likely to be much higher due to the steady outward migration of many indigenous whites from this area. Over the period 1971-1975, the largest increase in the population of Tower Hamlets occurred in the '65 and over' age group, while the smallest increase occurred in the '5-14' category. The '15-44' group increased by only 0.4%. Thus the overall direction of change in the population is towards the elderly.⁽¹²⁾

Nevertheless, and in spite of the above trends, Tower Hamlets has an above average overall economic activity rate which is very high for men and women between the ages of 15 and 44, but quite low for married women of the same age. This pattern is partly due to the low proportion of pupils staying on at school, college or university. The average adolescent leaves school as soon as he can to seek employment (See Table 1 below).

TABLE 1

Pupils aged 16 years and over at ILEA Maintained Secondary Schools as a Percentage of the Total School Roll, January 1975.

Division	No. over 16 years	Percentage Pupils 16 years or over
1	1942	10.8
2	2517	11.7
3	983	8.0
4	1024	8.9
5	656	5.2
6	1539	8.3
7	1727	9.1
8	1440	6.5
9	1568	9.2
10	2097	9.9
I.L.E.A.	15577	8.8
G.L.C.	43744	9.1

Source: Tower Hamlets Borough Plan Topic Paper (Education) Nov. 1976.

This table shows that, of the ten ILEA Divisions (Tower Hamlets shares Division 5 with the City of London), Division 5 has the lowest proportion of pupils '16 years or over' in maintained secondary schools. The nearest percentage to Tower Hamlets is 6.5% shown against Division 8. The rate achieved in Division 1, the highest scoring Division, is twice larger than the Tower Hamlets figure. Accordingly, a recent survey (1975) of school leavers from two boys' secondary schools in Tower Hamlets found that 60% had left school in 1973 with neither GCE nor CSE. This is well above the figure (20%) recorded for the GLC as a whole in 1973/74⁽¹³⁾.

The highest proportion of children, both at primary and secondary school levels receiving free school dinners, at day schools in 1974, was also recorded in Division 5⁽¹⁴⁾.

Housing Tenure and Birthplace

In a recent GLC report⁽¹⁵⁾ an analysis of birthplace in terms of a number of tenure variables, revealed a strong positive correlation between birthplace in India and Pakistan and privately rented furnished accommodation. By contrast, birthplace in Great Britain and Northern Ireland showed a strong negative correlation with privately rented furnished accommodation. Thus ethnic minority residents of Tower Hamlets relied heavily on privately rented homes. Given that the private housing sector in Tower Hamlets consists of mainly dilapidated housing, this must constitute a most serious disadvantage for Asians, particularly in the Spitalfields area where this population is most highly concentrated. For a fuller report on disadvantage in housing, see *Ethnic Minorities in the Inner City*, London, CRE, 1978, Chap. 3.

Current Patterns of Industry and Employment

Stepney Employment Exchange, into whose catchment Spitalfields falls, has acted as a fairly accurate barometer of industrial and employment patterns in Tower Hamlets. In the diagram in Appendix III, which is based on figures recorded at this Exchange during the period September 1973-76, 'male unemployment' is plotted against 'male vacancies' in a number of job areas. The results suggest very marked changes in employment patterns and opportunities, with the main industrial role being superseded by the trading and service role. This is indicated by a very steep rise in male unemployment in the 'unskilled manual' category and only a moderately high rise (by comparison) in the 'personal service, semi-skilled' category. Traditionally recruitment of manual unskilled labour has always been more active in manufacturing industries.

Yet, a survey of returns to the Stepney Employment Exchange in 1978⁽¹⁶⁾ has shown that nearly 4,600 jobs out of a total of 6,200 are in the clothing industry which is dependent upon manual labour. This level of demand is due to the comparative, slight decline in the clothing industry's share of the job market between 1971 and 1976 (from 25% in 1971 to 22% in 1976)⁽²¹⁾. But in spite of this slight decline and despite the fact that many clothing firms are located in the Spitalfields ward of the borough, a significant proportion of the ward's population do not work in this industry and do not appear to wish to do so. Its main work force is Asian. Without a rapid programme of retraining and redevelopment in the borough, its large pool of unemployed males must move out of the area or face a serious threat to their survival as workers.

Social Class Structure

The social class structure of the area reflects the concentration of manual workers as Table 2 below shows.

TABLE 2

Socio-economic Status in Tower Hamlets

Social Class	I	II	IIIa	IIIb	IV	V
	Higher Professional	Other Prof. & Tech.	Other Non-Manual	Skilled Manual	Semi-Skilled Manual	Unskilled Manual
Tower Hamlets	1.2	5.3	12.7	38.6	20.5	21.8
GLC	6.1	13.9	23.5	32.7	13.4	10.6

Source: Annual Abstract GLC Statistics 1973.

This table shows a great disparity in the distribution of socio-economic groups, between Tower Hamlets and the GLC area with a greater skew among workers in Classes IIIb, IV and V compared to the GLC as a whole. This disparity indicates that, in all such groups, the borough is well above the norm in London.

Other social indicators point to a preponderance of groups with social problems in this area compared to the GLC area as a whole and therefore the existence of multiple disadvantage as Table 3 shows.

TABLE 3

Other Social Indicators in Tower Hamlets

Social Indicators	Tower Hamlets	Compared to the Population in	
Children in care per 1000 pop. age 0-17	28.8	10.7	GLC
Homeless per 1000 families	4.2	2.1	GLC
Pensioners living alone	31%	26%	GLC
Illegitimate births	15%	12%	GLC
Single Parent Families per 1000 pop.	21	16	GLC
Educationally Deprived Areas	43%	31%	ILEA
Pollution SO ₂ micrograms per m ³	267	141	Redbridge
Households — more than 1 person per room	27.3%	15.7%	GLC
— no fixed bath or shower	23.9%	9.1%	GLC
— outside WC only	15.6%	8.1%	GLC
— no Continuous hot water	18.3%	7.7%	GLC

Source: Tower Hamlets Health District Plan (1978-1979).

Given the above trends, the future population of Tower Hamlets is likely to have a much higher ethnic minority component than was recorded in the 1971 Census. An increasingly large percentage of this comparatively young population will continue to be employed in the Rag Trade where they are already a dominant work force and where decline in its share of the job market has been slight (compared with other manufacturing industries). While this population remains highly concentrated in Spitalfields, its dependence on poor private sector housing will remain a serious disadvantage until access to the public sector improves rapidly.

By contrast, a much greater proportion of the economically active sector of the indigenous white population will continue to experience a high rate of unemployment unless it is retrained in order to do jobs within the 'personal services, semi-skilled' category. Without such training this population is likely to move out of the borough in ever increasing numbers. In any event, a greater percentage of the ethnic minority population together with the aged and various categories of the socially deprived will remain competitors for a limited and rapidly decreasing scale of facilities and opportunities in Tower Hamlets.

SECTION 4

INTERVIEW FINDINGS — RESPONSES FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Our in-depth interviews with representatives of local community organisations were designed to explore their views on the following main issues:

- (a) Their perception of the problems in the area and the residents of the area.
- (b) The efforts which they or their organisations have made to deal with some of its causes and consequences and
- (c) Their ideas as to what preventative measures could be taken to reduce the likelihood of such a situation arising in the future and reduce racial tensions in the area.

Local Perceptions

All of the representatives of local agencies interviewed by us, except one, worked in Tower Hamlets and, as workers, were concerned either with the whole of the borough or with the Spitalfields or neighbouring Shadwell wards.

Ratio and Concentration

Their perception of the size of the coloured population who live in their areas varied considerably. For example, those who worked in areas of high Bengali concentration were inclined to exaggerate the number of Bengalis whereas those who worked in the Shadwell ward under-estimated it. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents said that the greatest concentration of Bengalis existed in the Spitalfields ward and that, in recent months, it was evident that that population was moving outwards in considerable numbers:—

“The population is moving out from a considerable concentration in what we call Area 2 in the Social Services area which is largely the Spitalfields area. They are moving quite fast into Shadwell and to other parts of the Borough...”

Perceptions of the Bengali Community

Bengali women in particular were thought to ‘stand out’ more than their male counterparts by virtue of their form of dress and general demeanour:

“They are very noticeable to me and to the average person here in this area ... very much, they are very noticeable.

Yes, visible definitely, the Bengali ... although it is interesting sometimes that the very dark skinned white people (sic) are called Pakis ... but I think they are visually distinctive. Culturally they are”.

No other coloured minorities living in the borough were thought to be as noticeable. This is interesting since Somali women who have recently arrived in the area in significant numbers also wear a form of attire that is similar to that of the Bengali women but did not feature in these responses.

Partly because of this, the majority of respondents said that Bengalis are the one group of people against which most antagonism is directed. Some respondents identified Bengali women as the single most victimised group of Bengalis:

“Mostly the antagonism is directed at the women. I have seen youths down this road kick women in the market place, and run away: little white boys. They walk along, give a quick kick at a Bengali woman and run off, fast ... It is the families that take the stick”.

A few respondents felt that the perpetrators of this antagonism and, in some cases, violence did not come from within the local district community but came from outside the area.

However, one respondent felt that the antagonism to Bengalis in the area (and this was an isolated response) did not come from the local white community alone but came from every ethnic group living in the area and, accordingly suggested that:

“It is everybody. Historically it may be changing a little but there has been a lot of hostility from West Indians against Bengalis. About the only racist in Spitalfields at the moment is a Maltese. There is antagonism from Jewish people, certainly from black kids and from Pakistanis. There have been Punjabi kids who have been noted Paki bashers, so I think there is

no point at all in thinking about white people in that context. It is everybody who is hostile to Bengalis". "I have no doubt that some of these attacks are racial, but not a lot of them are" (same respondent as above).

To illustrate her point she cited the case of mugging:

"If an old lady is classically mugged and has her handbag ripped off, that is because she is an easy target and not because she is white. I understand that black old ladies and black middle-aged ladies have their handbags snatched in certain streets here and are liable to be mugged as well..."

Nevertheless, on the whole, respondents felt that though the motives for attacks varied considerably, the targets were always the same — a Bengali or Asian individual or group. Asians were thought to have been selected as targets because of the distinctively anti-Asian campaign that was being waged locally:

"Attacks are much more frequent on the Asian community as opposed to the West Indians because of the situation which has been created, whipped up and built up on the fears of a great invasion, our way of life being threatened, all this sort of garbage ... A total hysteria. It has been fanned by the presence of racist organisations screaming and shouting and whipping up tension against specifically the Asian community".

However, identifying the problem as one which is based on 'scapegoating' is one thing; this raised the question as to what efforts our respondents or the organisations they represent in the area have made to deal with either the causes or the consequences of violence in the area.

Some Local Efforts

On the question of how successful they have been in seeking to prevent inter-racial strife and violence, a cross-section of interviewees made the following remarks:

"I think things like the Bengali health visitor have been successful. I do not know how they are getting on with the nutrition survey but I would have thought that it is likely to be successful"

"Yes, it is picking up. In that sense it might be successful if the Labour Party locally starts trying to attract Bengali people into joining the Party and to stand as councillors. But that is something in the future"

"It is very difficult. We had a very, very big demonstration by East London standards, maybe 7,000 people in the pouring rain when Altab Ali was murdered. It was magnificent, the shops, the cinemas and everything shut. The Asian community came out, particularly the Bengalis.

It was totally ignored by the Press, almost ignored by the television which was more interested at that time in 30 or 50 pot smokers in Hyde Park"

However, over the past two years, there appears to have been no concerted programme to deal with the needs of ethnic minority communities in the area. There were, however, piecemeal efforts of various kinds:

"There are quite a number of odds and ends. There have been a whole series of things. We make funds available for quite small groups — £50, £25 — anything like that up to £600. We have funded groups which are very much angled towards Asian community groups and things of that nature".

"It (the Trades Council) is not similar to a normal voluntary organisation ... The policy making body is the TUC. We are the local body of the TUC and we are in touch with them about what is going on here and help shape, in a little way, what they will do about what is happening..."

In sum, our respondents have made various efforts through their community organisations to tackle some of the problems in their area but these efforts did not reflect a coherent approach to these problems. What then were their views concerning prevention? What sort of preventative action did they feel ought to be taken in the future?

Prevention — What must be done?

When asked what they thought could be done to prevent inter-racial strife and violence in the short-term, most people paused for a few seconds before giving an answer. This was to indicate that they had a lot to say but did not know where to start. However, they were clear about the risks:

"My fear now, and this is confirmed by reports I am getting from people acquainted with members of the National Front, is of an escalation of that kind of activity".

The Role of the Police

The role played by the police was another important factor which emerged from the interviews. Many respondents expressed grave concern about the way the police handled complaints by Bengalis:

"Very often the first stages of a complaint by an Asian are pre-empted because the complainant is asked for his passport"

"From the stories which Bengalis have told me about how they have been treated by the police from Bethnal Green police station, I think they have every good cause (to mistrust the police).

"There seems to be no way of proving that what they say is not the truth, because if you talk to the police officers you cannot get into conversations about it. They just say we are getting one side and not the other".

"Police leadership has to admit that there is a lot of racialism around in the police..."

Some said that the police should take positive steps to protect the victims of racially motivated attacks and to stem the tide of organised incitement to racial hatred under the Public Order Act, 1976 and suggested a need for an immediate examination by the Home Secretary of how the law on racial incitement is being interpreted:

"Our investigations from many sources would suggest that the people involved in the attacks up to early June have not been directly politically involved. They have responded, we believe, to the kind of atmosphere created by statements by prominent politicians, the press and particularly by the racist groups in the area ... a kind of second-hand effect that would not have occurred had not those people been members of the National Front or the British Movement or other racist groups in the area.

"It seems clearer and clearer to me that what the leadership of the extreme right wing groups want to see is a situation getting, as they can see it, out of hand with people thinking that the Asians are getting too uppity. Then the call will be for revenge and retaliation".

"...it was the day the National Front attempted to mobilise, so it was the week after the solidarity strike. On that day, I was in Brick Lane with a number of people from my church council and from Hackney Church Council and the Community Relations Council and a medium sized group of maybe 10 or 12 people from the National Front who were assembling at the top of Brick Lane, were allowed to walk through six police cordons and come right down past the mosque, right into the heart of the Bengali community, shouting out racist insults and trying to provoke trouble.

"The police reaction, while that was happening and while they were trying to provoke a fight, was to form a cordon against the people who were being provoked, to form a line and allow them to walk unaccompanied up the lane.

"I went with them and I was given the same gas chamber treatment (reference to an incident whereby NF people were shouting 'things about putting Dave Aubrey and other Jews in gas chambers').

"I asked the police to take their names. They refused. The police said they are the law and not me, so this is their business, they know what they are doing.

"Nobody took their names. There was no attempt made to stop them to find out who they were".

"Of course the people — often teenagers — responded to the level of racist and filthy ideas. But an indirect relationship is the situation in Brick Lane when 150 or more youngsters ran down the lane and smashed the windows ... when the pubs were shutting and the police were mysteriously absent. That incident was organised. The people were coming from various parts of London and were asking for the National Front activities organiser, Mr Styles, who is a local man. They were working for him and assembling. The Asian shopkeepers rang the police to say there was trouble on the way — there had been a minor incident the week before. There were no police there. The incident happened. The police arrived when the Asian community and some of the anti-racists began to fight and began to organise after half a dozen or more windows had been shattered. That was a very symbolic one. Until then the National Front had stayed towards the north end of Brick Lane, towards their patch..."

Relations between the Police and the Ethnic Minority Community

Understandably, respondents' perception of the relationship between the police and the ethnic minority community was negative especially with regards to adolescents:

"Communication with the older people is very bad, certainly with the leadership group. Generally with the Asian men on the street there is virtually nil communication between the police and those people because of the language."

"The Chief Inspector of Community Relations is on the Executive of the CRC and they always seem to be meeting, so there should be very good communication among those individuals, at least productive."

"The feeling of discrimination by kids of West Indian and African origin was a major source of tension in the early seventies when the racial tension was enormous between black youth and the police. It is still poor. There is a lot of harassment and it seems to go in waves or cycles"

"The youth are experiencing it first hand much more now than they were. They are out in the streets more, they are demanding rights more and asking questions. When people are attacked they are now complaining more than they used to. Earlier they did not bother to complain at all. They did not understand the system of complaining. They began to complain and were told to "f--- off". They were asked for their passports and asked where were the people they were doing it for. That soured a lot of people who came forward openly in the early days".

Training the Police

Given such a generally negative relationship, respondents pointed to the need for the police to be given better training on how to respond to a race relations situation:

"... to me also, policemen who come here must have better training. I have said that before ... What they need is some sort of sensible induction which the people could handle themselves. That is the sort of thing that John Wallis could do and would be very good at setting up. He could explain what the problems are and so on. There are always dangers in that sort of in-service training; but there are ways of doing it and there are ways in which it could be done really well".

"That (referring to the manner in which, it is alleged, the police treat Bengalis) may be as a result of the instructions the police get. It may be that so much discretion is allowed to the individual policeman who is able to use his individual discretion very widely. If that is the case ... it seems to me that what is needed is a much more strict set of instructions as to how to behave. I very much doubt whether that will be done at all..."

Strengthening Local Organisations

All the respondents, except one, felt that local community organisations should be strengthened:

"We tried, despite many real difficulties, to make the local community relations council less of a joke. I guess that is part of the answer".

"It feels almost like guilt, but it has to be said that the community relations in this area are really bad ... I do not think they will ever really come to terms with the Bengali people at all. Even last year on the Executive they almost seem to pretend they did not exist".

"Community relations itself has to be thoroughly overhauled and made sure that it is totally and properly serving the needs of the Asian community. It may not be serving the needs of the West Indian community adequately, but there is a chance. I think there are signs that people are trying to change. Also, I do not think one could succeed in that until one does something about Tower Hamlets Council..."

"We have been doing our best to make sure that the emergence of young Bengali workers as a militant group does not develop in isolation from the mass of the labour movement of the organised working class".

"We are supporting the Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee that the CRCs have set up".

"I think the local CRC probably needs to be a leader in its own right as well as a leader of many other similar bodies within the area..."

Bengali Representation in Local Organisation

When respondents were asked about the extent of Bengali representation within their organisations, the nature of whose work and structure varied considerably, the following points were made:

"One of the things that really irritated me, and I tried through the Executive to do something about it, was this question of membership because there is an obsession within the CCTH that people will infiltrate. I do not know what they mean. Sometimes they say that left-wing groups will take over. Members of the Executive are paranoid about left-wing groups..."

"I have said so many times ... why should I not say it again. I think that CCTH was influenced by a group of people, some of them were Pakistani, some of them were Bangladeshi, that belonged to a movement which was intent on the unification of Bangladesh and Pakistan. At one time I think they truly believed that they were in touch with the Asian community through these sources and had not realised the political problem that existed within the Council. After a time, in spite of arguments from some of us who had realised what was happening, the whole thing became so embarrassing that matters simply drifted."

"If there had been more ordinary Bengalis in it, the Executive Committee, from the feedback it was getting, would have realised much more clearly the troubles which were building up. They were being sheltered from reality because they were not getting reports back. The one or two people who were reporting back were looked on as being people who exaggerated the situation. And, after a time, anything you said was said so often that people would not listen anymore. You were being bloody-minded because you were going against the rest".

"Very few of the Bengalis in this area are of the calibre normally associated with the membership of the CCTH".

"Bengalis or West Indians or other Asians are not active members of the Trades Council. There are 90 delegates to the Trades Council and we do not have any West Indian or Asian people in that. We could have, but we do not have and that is a disturbing thing".

"A number of Trades Council people have come from the old immigrant communities such as the Jewish community. They are worried about the ghetto mentality; the retreatist response to the problems that are faced by the immigrant community".

"The membership of our body does not reflect the ethnic composition of the area served by us. The reason for this is probably that when the project was first set up, our management committee was originally composed of members of the borough council, the GLC and the ILEA".

"In terms of the workers it is quite simple. We are professional youth and community workers and until one guy who we helped to get into college and to finish a youth and community course returned, there was no Bengali who was qualified. Obviously whenever workers are appointed here, there is a hope that there will be a Bengali youth worker, but there has not been. There was a Punjabi guy who worked with us for about three years".

"That is one reason, just the way we were set up and structured. Another must be the actual relevance which Bengali organisations give to the project. Another point is that we have been going for three years now. During that time the amount of organisation that has taken place in the Bengali community has been very noticeable. There have been a whole series of groups that have begun to get organised on a much more formal basis".

Cooperation Between Local Voluntary Agencies

The unequivocal view that emerged about the level of cooperation and communication between the various local agencies was that it was traditionally poor, but had improved a little in recent months, due to the steadily deteriorating race relations situation:

"There is an element for all the organisations, of waking up to be on the edge of a tinder box racial situation. But, more than that, waking up to a realisation that people are making demands that we have to respond to; that we cannot sit back anymore. A lot of things are beginning to happen right round the spectrum. Because the Community Relations Council now is less of a joke, the Council (Local Authority) is now talking about putting up more money for them instead of saying we are not spending money on something that is a farce".

"There has been a level of distrust between the various agencies and the CCTH. Very few people have given CCTH much credibility. Similarly, very few agencies have given the immigrants much recognition of their special needs".

In the next section, we discuss the findings we obtained from our interviews with Bengalis in the area.

SECTIONS

INTERVIEW FINDINGS — RESPONSES FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF BENGALI ORGANISATIONS

The Bengali respondents who were interviewed represented various voluntary organisations in the Borough of Tower Hamlets. The main area of their work is Spitalfields, although some of them operate in areas covered by Commercial Road and Middlesex Street.

These respondents keep in touch with the Bengali community either in the course of executing their responsibilities to their own organisations or as individual residents in need of advice:

- (a) Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council
- (b) Robert Montefiore Centre
- (c) Spitalfields Project
- (d) Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee.

Contacts with these organisations are regular and are largely maintained through the initiatives of their office-bearers. Most respondents mentioned the names of Dan Jones, David Cheetham, Alan Sinclair and Patrick Kodikara in this context. Bengalis keep in touch with these organisations for a variety of reasons: to seek information and advice for public meetings and occasionally using the resources of these organisations for political campaigns. The typical comment was, 'we go to these organisations because they are helpful. And moreover their leaders are always willing to talk to us'.

All these organisations were thought to represent, or at least, respond to the interests of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets. The organisation which was regarded as being most responsive to their needs was the Trades Council. Its importance was largely attributed to the personality of the Secretary, Dan Jones, who was said to be in regular touch with the respondents on a variety of matters:

"The Trades Council is the only organisation which has the interests of our community very much in mind ... The majority of the Bengalis do not speak English. The Council speaks for them to the authorities".

"The Trades Council has been consistently campaigning for our rights in Tower Hamlets...".

The Trades Council's work in monitoring racial violence in Tower Hamlets was regarded as 'extremely useful' by the respondents:

"The Council has compiled a list of racial attacks on the local Bengali community. This is very useful. This list will have more credibility with the authorities than all our complaints in the past."

The Robert Montefiore Centre was primarily regarded as a resource and community centre for local Bengali organisations:

"The Robert Montefiore Centre is our Resource centre. We use their telephone, stationery and other facilities for our organisational purposes ... We use it as a meeting place".

The Spitalfields Project, on the other hand, was praised for its proposed 'Kobi Nazrul Centre' (a community centre for Bengalis) and its appointment of a Bengali Health worker in the past:

"The Project is trying to set up the Kobi Nazrul Centre (a community centre) for us ... They have been dragging their feet on this for sometime ... But even then that is a step in the right direction".

"The Project appointed a Bengali health worker in the past. That was a great success. It is a pity it didn't have the money to carry on with this project".

The interviewees regarded the Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee as an umbrella type of organisation within which the political differentiations among the Bengali community could be mediated and the immediate task of facing racist attacks tackled:

"There are deep-rooted political differences among the Bengalis of Tower Hamlets ... There are many (Bengali) leaders ... most of them are busy knifing each other ... The Defence Committee is the only organisation which makes a united resistance to racism in Tower Hamlets possible".

"The Committee (CCTH) cannot go on for ever ... There are people in the Committee who do not have any credibility with the Bengalis of Tower Hamlets ... There are others who use their affiliation with the Committee to recruit members of their own organisations ... Socialist Workers Party for example".

"I shudder to think what will happen when the Committee disbands ... The Bengalis can never unite".

The main organisation which was seen to have failed to respond to the needs of the Bengali community was the Council of Citizens of Tower Hamlets (CCTH):

"The CCTH is lacking in proper representation from the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets. However, there was a representative from Bangladesh Welfare Association, 39 Fournier Street. This representation came to grief due to internal dissensions within the Association. But the Welfare Association is not the only organisation in Tower Hamlets. There are other organisations (Bengali) too. The CCTH must have representations from them".

"The trouble with the CCTH is that they have all the wrong contacts with the Bengali community. The people they are in touch with do not represent the interests of the Bengali community at all ... They are mainly pro-Pakistani elements".

The other agency which came under criticism from the interviewees was the London Borough Council of Tower Hamlets. There was a general consensus that the local authority was totally unresponsive to the housing, health and social services needs of the Bengali community.

"The local authority refuses to recognise that the Bengalis in the Borough have special needs. This is mainly due to their newness in this country and lack of knowledge of the English language. These are not the problems the indigenous whites suffer from. But the local authority does not seem to recognise this".

What preventive action would they like to see?

Remedial/Preventive Action

The respondents made various suggestions for improving race relations in Tower Hamlets. These suggestions, however, were mostly directed at the CCTH and the LBTH. They clearly saw improvement of race relations as a common responsibility of all local agencies. Accordingly,

(a) Council of Citizens of Tower Hamlets

There was a general consensus that the Council of Citizens of Tower Hamlets, despite its failings in the past, had possibilities — "The CCTH has tremendous potentialities but it must change its orientation and operational style. It must involve the Bengalis of Tower Hamlets".

The way to involve the Bengalis would be:

"...to recruit more Bengalis to the executive of the CCTH. The CCTH should ignore political differences ... after all there are political differences within the CCTH Executive itself. But that does not stop them from cooperating with each other".

(b) Community Relations officer (Bengali-speaking)

The respondents maintained that in order to achieve the fullest potentialities of the CCTH, it should appoint a Bengali-speaking CRO who would liaise with the community.

"This will change the image of the CCTH to the Bengalis almost overnight. The Bengalis will have a contact person in the CCTH: This CRO can act as a catalyst".

(c) Housing

This was regarded by respondents as the most important problem affecting the Bengalis in Tower Hamlets. The housing allocation policy of the LBTH was felt to be weighted heavily against the Bengalis. It was pointed out that very few Bengalis could meet the 5-year residential requirement because many of them go back to Bangladesh to see their wives and children after a few years and in the process, break the continuity of their residence in Tower Hamlets. The local authorities' policies were seen to be far too rigid and inflexible:

"The Bengalis find it extremely hard to meet the Borough's 5-year residential requirement. They come to the Borough largely on their own. But they go back home after a few years to see their wives and children ... breaking the continuity of their residence in Tower Hamlets".

"The whole thing appears to be a vicious circle. The immigration authorities stop us from bringing our families. And if we don't have our families with us we don't qualify for council accommodation".

(d) **Health**

(i) **Health Visitor (Bengali-speaking)**

The respondents drew attention to the health problems of their community due to their newness and lack of knowledge of English and emphasised the importance of appointing a Bengali-speaking health visitor:

"This is a very important need. But all our requests to get a Bengali-speaking health visitor have come up against a stonewall. The local authority had met our request with a chilling silence".

(ii) **Waste Disposal**

The Borough's garbage disposal service also came under severe criticism:

"The Borough's garbage disposal facilities are extremely poor ... at any rate, they are not extended to a large number of Bengali families...The dustmen do not come regularly... The result is garbage piles up giving the impression that Bengalis are a dirty filthy people".

This allegation, however, was not echoed by the younger respondents.

(e) **Social Services**

The Borough's social services facilities were felt to be generally inadequate. However two specific needs were identified:

(i) **Community Centre**

There is no community centre for the Bengalis in the Brick Lane/Spitalfields area:

"There is a strong need for a community centre in this area. The centre should be used not only for recreation but also for counselling and advice ... The Bengalis could set up their own community centre at the Welfare Association, 39 Fournier Street. But they need full-time workers to run the centre. The local authority or the Manpower Services Commission could help.

(ii) **Family Workshop**

The need for a family workshop was also emphasised:

"The local authority should set up a family workshop for Bengali women to help them cope with their health problems. This is vital, because a lot of problems arise from our ignorance as to how to tackle these problems in an urban situation".

(f) **Employment**

There was general satisfaction with the employment situation among adult respondents. However, this satisfaction was not shared by the adolescents:

"Let's face it, there is very little unemployment among the Bengali youth. They are absorbed in the rag trade. They live with their families and earn an extra little something which they can save. That can't be too bad".

"True, there is very little unemployment among the Bengali youth. But the nature of their jobs is far from satisfactory. The Rag Trade combines our family and work situations. Not infrequently a boy's boss is his own father or close relative. This seriously impinges on his independence".

"The Rag Trade is a seasonal business. There is a lot of myth surrounding this trade. But the basic wages are very low and we have to do a lot of overtime. It was OK with our parents but we want more time for ourselves. There should be jobs in the borough with enough basic wages for a person to live on".

(g) **Education**

Robert Montefiore School

There was a grave concern among the respondents about the proposed closure of the Robert Montefiore School:

"This is a retrograde step. The Bengali community was benefiting from this school and now it is to close down. The authorities say that more people are moving out of the Borough than coming in. That may or may not be true ... we don't know. But the fact remains that a lot of Bengalis are moving into Tower Hamlets. More and more of us are bringing our families. There is nowhere to send our kids to".

"It is very difficult to send the children to schools outside the area. There is racial violence all the time and one is not sure if the kid will come back from the school in one piece. In Robert Montefiore we could always keep an eye on our children but if they are moved we cannot do that".

When asked how inter-racial violence can be prevented in Tower Hamlets, most respondents, especially the young, stressed the need to curb the activities of the National Front and improve the behaviour of the police. Enforcement of the law against incitement was seen to be vital.

Short-Term Prevention of Inter-Racial Violence

There was a general consensus that racial violence in Tower Hamlets was a consequence of the activities of the National Front in the area:

"The National Front keeps on coming to Brick Lane, apparently to sell their papers which are highly offensive anyway ... But they take the opportunity to hurl abuses and insults on the Bengalis. The adult Bengalis ignore these insults but the youths react ... Brick Lane has become a flashpoint of racial violence".

"There should not be any objection in talking to the police. If the police are interested in stopping racial violence we can certainly talk to them. But more often than not, they are interested in information on illegal immigrants and extremists".

The older respondents on the other hand, seemed to have a better relationship with the police. This was largely attributable to their reluctance to take the 'law into their own hands'. They looked to the police for protection against racial violence:

"There is no use pretending that we can stop the racial violence on our own. If we take the law into our own hands, it will not only be counter-productive but also alienate the white community. There is goodwill for the Bengali community among whites in Tower Hamlets ... we don't want to lose it, and after all law and order is the business of the police".

Communication with the police, however, was felt to be very bad. This was partly due to language difficulties and to the police officers' misunderstandings of the issue of illegal immigrants.

General Attitudes Towards the Police

The attitude of the youths towards the police was negative. There is a very deep-rooted suspicion of the police and none of the youths interviewed was willing to cooperate with the police force.

"The youths are not at all happy about the police. We are being constantly stopped and searched for offensive weapons. We don't carry such weapons but we go out in groups. We have been ambushed too many times in the past that we don't want to take any chances".

"The police are actually stopping us from getting the National Front off our streets. Whenever a conflict situation arises in Brick Lane, the police clamp down on us rather than on the National Front".

"People are simply scared to report incidents of violence to the police. The police turn on the complainants. They pick them up on charges of being illegal immigrants".

"The police tend to ignore our complaints. They arrive on the scene far too late. They seem reluctant to take down statements from the victims and don't follow them up even if they do".

"The police are always using language difficulties as a ploy for their inaction. They refuse to act even when interpreters are provided".

"Brick Lane is the most heavily policed area now. It looks like a police state during the weekends. But, the police do not understand our problems. There is a tendency on the part of some Bengalis to move in groups. The police don't like it. These people are stopped and questioned.

The situation is further aggravated by the import of police officers from other districts of London. These officers are rather youngish and lack experience in dealing with immigrants, especially those immigrants like the Bengalis who have very little knowledge of English".

"The police must have right contacts with the Bengali community. There appears to be a lot of ignorance about us in the police force. Chief Inspector Wallis claimed on the TV that the Bengalis resolve their differences through mediation within their own community without reporting these incidents to the police. True, we resolve our minor differences among ourselves but crime is a different matter. We always report incidents of crime to the police.

But here in Britain we hesitate to go to the police because our experience of going to them in the past is not quite encouraging".

"The National Front organise street-corner meetings. These meetings are used for hate campaigns against the Bengalis ... They use all sorts of ploys to incite the local whites against us. They tell the shopkeepers (whites) that Bengalis are taking over their business ... They brought along some mini-cab drivers. Their firms had gone bust due to competition from an Asian. But that Asian was not a Bengali. There are some Asian stalls in Petticoat Lane market. The National Front is using it as a ploy to incite local whites against Bengalis".

"The racial incitement law must be enforced. The police are the only people who can enforce this. But they seem reluctant to do so. Perhaps they do not want to offend their kith and kin".

The need for special police training to cope with the situation was also raised. The respondents felt that the local CRC could help in this respect.

The only group of respondents who seemed to have very good relationships with the local police were local Bengali businessmen. This is partly due to the initiative of the local police themselves. The interviewees gave the impression that the police consciously cultivated these relationships:

"The police are cooperative. The officers on the beat occasionally drop into my shop, sometimes to make general enquiries, sometimes just to say hello."

"I had difficulties with a diner (white) who refused to pay. I called the police. They arrived within five minutes. They forced the diner to pay up. The diner had to oblige. Mind you, the police were over-stepping their limits. They are only supposed to get you the address of the diner and ask you to go to your solicitor. But they made the diner pay".

"Of course I am willing to cooperate with them (the police). The lads (workers of his sweat shops) are getting funny ideas about strikes (sic). The police can help us in these situations".

Sources of Advice

The majority of respondents indicated that there were no agencies they could approach if they needed advice and help with their problems and consequently have to resort to their own community. They also have contacts with (apart from the organisations mentioned in the preceding pages) the Anti-Nazi League and sympathetic individuals in the area. However, they placed greater emphasis on the Bengali community itself:

"When Altab Ali was murdered, at first, we didn't know what to do. Then we had a series of consultations among ourselves, set up a defence committee and organised a demonstration and marched to Downing Street which got some publicity from the mass media. That is how we alerted the authorities".

"There are anti-racist people and organisations among the host community and we approach them in case of urgent need. But we mobilise our community before doing so".

"The most important thing is self-help. If a community cannot help itself, no one else can help it".

The Bengalis have various self-help groups in the Tower Hamlets area. These are mainly youth groups. Many interviewees said that the encouragement to set up these groups came, in the main, from the community itself. The demographic concentration of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets made it relatively easy for them to communicate among themselves. The need for protection usually arises in the face of violence and this is relayed most effectively through a 'gossip network' which results in group meetings to work out the strategic problems of combating or avoiding violence. The only agency which is carefully avoided is the police.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

The evidence of this inquiry shows that while the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets live in an area of serious inner city deprivation, as did the Jewish immigrants before them, nevertheless it is their concentration in that environment which appears to be salient for the majority of the non-Bengali respondents we interviewed. The Bengali respondents, however, did not attach particular significance to this but stressed the importance of their community network which provides security for them in a hostile environment. Considerable care therefore ought to be exercised in determining the extent to which the environmental deprivation in the area merely gives added significance to their concentration as against the extent to which the concentration of the Bengali community in that area is in itself the crucial issue. The evidence obtained from non-Bengali respondents suggests that concentration is an issue only to the extent that it is thought to be significant whereas the deprivation in the area is a much more fundamental issue as our analysis of the social conditions of the area emphasised.

The inquiry also found that:

- (1) As Bengalis qualified for rehousing in Tower Hamlets attempts were made by the housing authorities operating in the area to accommodate their needs in some cases well outside the primary areas of Bengali settlement in the East End. However, as reports of harassment and attacks against Asians in the East End began to filter through to those on the waiting list, a number of Bengalis responded by making specific requests for certain areas which they thought were safer from attacks. Some of these requests were met but, as the attacks increased in frequency, leading to many more urgent requests, neither the local council nor the GLC could keep pace with them. For, besides those who wanted to go out to specific areas, there were many others who wanted to return to the primary areas of Bengali settlement.

The result was considerable panic amongst the Bengali community, which was accompanied by a massive increase in squatting. This panic was mainly responsible for the controversy over the alleged sanctioning of 'Bengali housing ghettos' by the local authority. In addition, the whole 'allocation practice' of the local authority and the GLC as it applied to the Bengali community was 'blown off' course and requires to be reviewed.

- (2) A great deal of anxiety was expressed about the role played by local organisations in helping to promote racial equality. Much of this anxiety was expressed about the local Community Relations Council (CCTH) which in itself was thought (by respondents) to be weak and unresponsive to local needs, particularly those of the Bengali community. It was generally felt by our respondents that unless this body plays a stronger coordinating role in the future than it has played in the past, it would continue to lose public respect and support and be unable to make much of an impact on the local race relations scene.

One of the reasons why this co-ordinating role was felt to be necessary was because the structure, priorities and objectives of other community agencies would tend to limit their independent ability to respond to the specific needs of ethnic minorities in the area.

- (3) An analysis of violent attacks (based on records provided in *Blood on the Streets*) indicate the following:

- (a) Just under a quarter (21.5%) of all recorded attacks took place in the 1976 period with little over a quarter of all 'serious to fatal' ones happening during that period;
- (b) In 1977 there was a fall in all serious to fatal attacks (to about one-third of the previous year's but an increase in the total number of attacks of all kinds;
- (c) In 1978 the highest frequency (46.3%) and intensity (well over a half of all 'serious to fatal') of attacks were recorded;
- (d) Starting at the perimeter of the Borough, the attacks moved progressively closer to the Spitalfields area until they came near to the heart of the Bengali community where they became most frequent and intensive.

This pattern coincides with the attempts made by many Bengalis to move towards the centre of their community in the Brick Lane area.

- (4) Respondents were unanimous in their condemnation of all types of attacks against Bengalis and other groups, both black and white, and of organised attempts to incite racial hatred and violence. A number of them felt that the whole question of racial incitement particularly how the law is being interpreted, needs to be looked at by the Home Secretary as well as the role which the local police force can play in dealing with these attacks.

In the minds of a majority of respondents these attacks, and the organised attempts to incite racial hatred in Tower Hamlets, are clearly associated with the way the police have responded to the whole situation. For example, it was said that while the police discouraged Bengalis from making complaints about attacks (by asking to see their passports), they appear to have condoned organised attempts to incite racial hatred. This underlines a very great breach in public confidence in the willingness of the police to 'treat all citizens equally before the law'.

- (5) The overall pattern of events in Tower Hamlets, but also throughout the East End strongly indicates that the police have a vital and strategic role to play in eliminating violence from the streets of this part of London. In the present climate of race relations, their role could be put to a most severe test in the run up to a general election. The police will not succeed in performing this task successfully unless public confidence is fully restored.

SECTION 7

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. The Commission should seek urgent consultations with the Metropolitan Commissioner with a view to:
 - (a) Ensuring that every opportunity is taken by the police to increase the number of prosecutions under the present law on incitement to racial hatred;
 - (b) Expressing concern about numerous reports that the police inhibit complaints from Bengalis in Tower Hamlets by asking them to produce their passports and other documents;
 - (c) Increasing the level of in-service training for police officers in the area and
 - (d) Exploring other ways by which the confidence of the public in Tower Hamlets in the police can be restored.
2. The Commission should urge the local authority (LBTH) and the GLC to review their policy (and practice) towards housing ethnic minorities in the light of the present situation in Tower Hamlets, and, in particular, where:
 - (a) Residential or other qualifications add to the many disadvantages of these minorities;
 - (b) Abuse or intimidation of various kinds, on housing estates, seriously threatens their security and happiness.

Towards consideration of (b), these authorities (LBTH and GLC) might consider:

 - (i) Reintroducing the resident caretaker service in areas where it has been superseded by a mobile unit.
 - (ii) Setting up a Joint Working Party which includes the GLC's district Housing Manager, to examine this matter in the light of the present situation of abuse, intimidation and violence against Bengalis and other ethnic minorities.
3. The ILEA, the MSC and the CRE should set up a joint Working Party to review the urgent and specific adult education needs of the Bengali community in the area and make recommendations as to how these needs can be met as a matter of urgency. Language training for women, especially, as well as training in social skills should be included in that review.
4. The MSC and the CRE should urgently inquire into the job-related training needs of the employed and unemployed population in the area in the light of the demographic profile of the area which shows a higher concentration of older people compared to other areas in London. The outcome of such an inquiry will help to establish how the job-related training programmes of the MSC can be best applied to the population in that area.
5. The Commission should urge the Director of Social Services (LBTH) to look into the various ways in which his department might be better able to meet the specific and urgent needs of the local Bengali community. Health, Community Welfare and Family Care are among the most urgent of those needs.
6. The Commission should increase its level of financial support to the CCTH to enable them to acquire more suitable office accommodation and a full-time professional secretariat. Further, a joint Working Party should be set up between the Commission and the CCTH to explore ways and means by which the latter's credibility with all sections of the community in Tower Hamlets can be increased and thus place them in a better position to co-ordinate the efforts being made by community groups in the area to promote equality of opportunity.
7. An urgent review of the effects of the Docklands Scheme on employment opportunities in the surrounding areas is required in the light of the general decline in employment opportunities in Tower Hamlets area. This inquiry should also look at ways by which the Dockland Partnership Scheme (under the Inner City Programme) can contribute to the removal of urban blight in the neighbouring areas.

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR REPRESENTATIVES
OF LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

(a) Name and Address:

.....

.....

.....

(b) Length of Residence
at present address:

(c) Membership of
Organisations,
Bodies, Agencies
etc.

.....

.....

.....

ORGAN. EXEC. STAFF ASSOC. DURATION OF

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Are there any other
coloured minorities who
you think are as noticeable
(Probe for West Indians)

.....

.....

.....

	WORK	LIVE	WORSHIP/OTHER
VN	_____	_____	_____
MN	_____	_____	_____
NN	_____	_____	_____

Can you say why these groups are noticeable?

(Probe for:

- Physical Visibility
- Cultural Visibility
- Lack of Social Mixing)

(a) Bengalis/Bangladeshis/Pakistanis

.....
.....
.....

(b) West Indians

.....
.....
.....

(c) Other Groups

.....
.....
.....

(2) In our discussion we have talked about

- (a)
- (b)
- (c)

At which group do you think most antagonism is directed by the local white community?

.....
.....
.....

Is this antagonism directed most at the

- (a) Youth
- (b) Adults
- (c) Business Community

- (i)
- (ii)
- (iii)

(Probe for order of intensity)

(3) How do you keep in touch with developments which relate to inter-racial strife or violence?
(Probe for:

.....
.....
.....

(a) Hearsay

.....

(b) Informal contacts

.....

(c) Police Liaison

(d) The Press

What do you think can be
done to prevent inter-
racial strife and violence?

(Probe for short-term as
opposed to long-term?)

What have you done to
tackle this problem in the
short-term?

Do you think you have been
successful?

If not, why not?

- (4) Does the membership of
your body reflect the
ethnic composition of the
area/areas served by you?

YES

NO

DON'T KNOW

If yes, what proportion of
Bengalis/...../..... are
active members?

(a) On the executive

(b) As employees

If no, what do you think
are the reasons for this?
(Probe for policy towards
in-group self-help)

- (5) Are there elements of your
programme (say, over the
past two years) which
relate directly to the
needs of the ethnic minority
communities who live and
work in the areas served by
you?

Are your programmes based on general or specific recommendations made by:

-
-
- (a) A Funding Agency
- (b) A Policy-making body
- (c) A Research Agency
- (d) An Administering body

If not, how are your programmes decided?
(Probe for consultation)

.....

.....

.....

(6) What kind of relationship do you think the local police have with:

- The youth
- The older immigrants
- The local CRC
- The Business community
- Race/Community Relations groups?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(Probe for cooperation and communication)

Cooperate:	VG	G	Ind.	B	VB
Youth	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Older Imm.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
CRC	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Business	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Race/Com	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Communicate:	VG	G	Ind.	B	VB
Youth	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Older Imm.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
CRC	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Business	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Race/Com	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

(7) What kind of cooperation is there between the various agencies in the service areas?
(Probe for system)

.....

.....

.....

.....

AGENCIES	FORMAL	INFORMAL	INTER- MITTENT
----------	--------	----------	-------------------

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

What kind of communication
is there between the
various agencies in the
service areas?
(Probe for system)

.....

.....

.....

.....

AGENCIES	FORMAL	INFORMAL	INTER- MITTENT
----------	--------	----------	-------------------

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Details of Respondent

(a) Name and Address

.....

.....

(b) Age

.....

(c) Objects
(In accordance with constitution)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

INTERVIEWING SCHEDULE FOR REPRESENTATIVES
OF BENGALI ORGANISATIONS

- (1) What areas are you most concerned with in your work?

.....

What do you consider to be the ratio of coloured people there?

.....

Of the coloured people there, what proportion do you consider to be Bengali/Bangladeshi/Pakistani?

.....

Where in the above areas would you say there are concentrations of Bengalis/Bangladeshis/Pakistanis?

.....

WORK	LIVE	WORSHIP/OTHER
------	------	---------------

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Are these concentrations

.....

(a) Very noticeable?

.....

(b) Moderately noticeable?

.....

(c) Not noticeable?

.....

	WORK	LIVE	WORSHIP/OTHER
--	------	------	---------------

VN	_____	_____	_____
MN	_____	_____	_____
NN	_____	_____	_____

Questions:

- (1) Have you had any contact with the following organisations, bodies, Agencies:

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

If yes, what kind of contact
have you had?
(Probe for: seeking info, advice,
attending public meeting etc.)

.....
.....
.....

If no, why not?
(Probe for: lack of interest,
info, confidence etc.)

.....
.....
.....

- (2) What organisations, bodies,
agencies do you think
represent the interest of the
Bengali/Bangladeshi/Pakistani
Community?

.....
.....
.....

Would you list them?

.....
.....
.....

- (3) What organisations, bodies, agencies
do you think have failed to respond to
the needs of the Bengali/Bangladeshi/
Pakistani Community!

Would you list them?

.....
.....
.....

- (4) What do you think needs to be
done in order to:

(a) Improve Race Relations in Tower Hamlets

.....
.....
.....

(b) Stop interracial violence in Tower Hamlets

- (5) How do the Bengali Community communicate their needs (for help of various kinds and protection) to the local authorities, bodies etc?

- (6) How do the Bengali community get help urgently?

- (7) Have the Bengalis had any encouragement to form self-help groups?

YES

NO

DON'T KNOW

- (8) If yes, from what source? (Probe for local authority voluntary organisations)

Name and Address

(9) What kind of relationship
do Bengali Youth have with
local police?

.....
.....
.....
Cooperate: VG G Ind. B VB

Communicate: VG G Ind. B VB

(10) What kind of relationship do
the older Bengalis have with
the local police?

.....
.....
Cooperate: VG G Ind. B VB

(11) What kind of relationship do
the Bengali Business community
have with the local police?

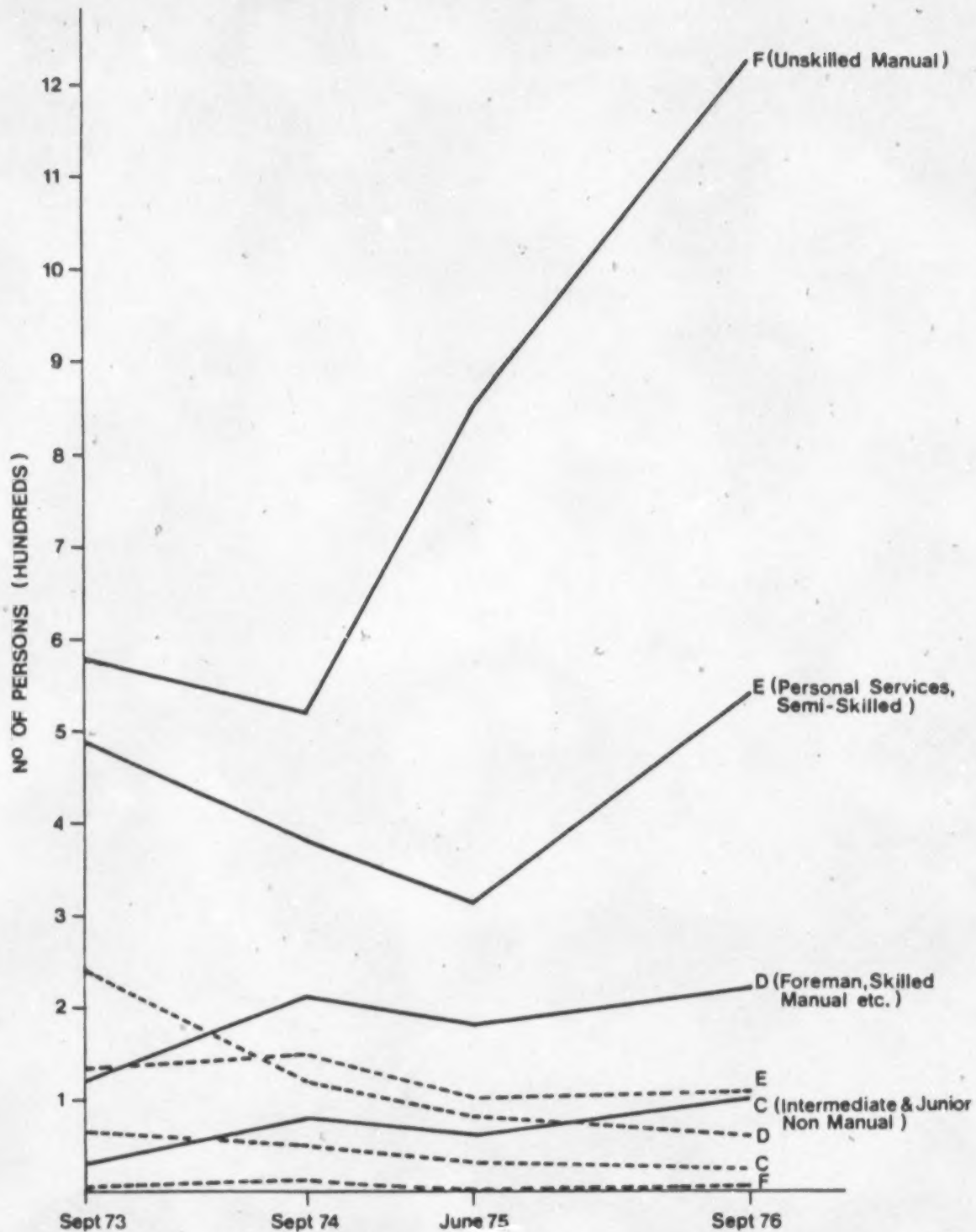
.....
.....
Cooperate: VG G Ind. B VB

Communicate: VG G Ind. B VB

UNEMPLOYMENT AND VACANCIES*

(Males Sept. 1973-76)

APPENDIX III



* Area of the Stepney Employment Office
Source : Department of Employment

— MALE UNEMPLOYMENT
- - - MALE VACANCIES

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN FROM MINORITY GROUPS: Reference Series No 1 (Reprint) . . .	50p
THE EDUCATION OF ETHNIC MINORITY CHILDREN	80p
IN SERVICE EDUCATION OF TEACHERS IN MULTI-RACIAL AREAS: An Evaluation of Current Practice	60p
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FIVE VIEWS OF MULTI-RACIAL BRITAIN: Talks on Race Relations Broadcast by BBC TV	£1.00
BETWEEN TWO CULTURES: A Study in Relationship between Generations in the Asian Community in Britain: — by M. Anwar, Reference Series No.12	£1.00
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SEEN BUT NOT SERVED: Black Youth & the Youth Service.	50p
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NO PROBLEMS HERE?: Management and Multi-Racial Workforce including a Guide to the Race Relations Act, 1976 (IPM & CRE).	£1.50
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FIRST REPORT OF THE CRE (June 1977-December 1977). HMSO	£2.50
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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN EMPLOYMENT: A Guide for Employers.	Free
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